

evaluations. When working on a first-time program, you may wish to contact industry colleagues who have produced similar events to obtain insight and valuable feedback.

Planning Tools

A critical path should be developed to obtain a more realistic and working understanding of a given time-frame. This document is a basic roadmap that provides an overview highlighting crucial dates and final deadlines. It is the framework for further development of a more comprehensive timeline.

A timeline is a chronological list of tasks with specific start and end dates, as well as separate columns for who is responsible for each action item and what percentage of its completion; it is the ultimate checklist for your project. This document can also be referred to as a production schedule when dealing more closely with complex operational functions.

A meeting/event grid is a detailed chart providing a compartmentalized picture of the components of your program. Depending upon the number of moving parts, the final document will vary significantly. I've found the easiest way to prepare one, at least initially, is in a simple spreadsheet. Identify all the meeting rooms and event spaces and place them in a left-side

minute description of what is expected from the time of your onsite arrival to your departure. It is your working script for the program's duration. The level of complexity will vary greatly depending on the nature of your meeting or event.

In the famous words of Geoffrey F. Albert, "The most important thing about having goals is having one." Effectively incorporating pre-planning efforts into your projects will save time and allow for greater strategic control. It isn't always easy to find the time, but investing in a well-crafted plan at the beginning of your endeavor will undoubtedly make life easier down the road. **LVN**

Elaina Spring served as Miller Nash's event planner from 2001 until August of 2006. She relocated to Vancouver, British Columbia this summer to pursue a new career coordinating meetings and events internationally. She has recently begun volunteering with the pre-planning efforts for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. Elaina received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications from the Evergreen State College, with a supplemental Business Certificate in Event Management from the University of Oregon. She is a member of Meeting Professionals International (MPI) and has obtained a Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation. She can be reached at elaina.spring@gmail.com.

The varying techniques used to plot action plans are unique, just like our individual goals and objectives, as well as those of the organizations we represent.

column. Then, list details and particulars (such as room setup, food and beverage requirements, audiovisual requests, and other relevant specifications) across the top. This information can ultimately be shared with suppliers to ensure nothing is overlooked.

Agenda

Drilling down further, a program agenda is created to outline the topics scheduled to be addressed. It is not uncommon for it to be prepared with the intention of providing it directly to your audience. Depending on the event, it is sometimes advantageous to distribute the agenda several months in advance.

The behind-the-scenes equivalent to an agenda is referred to as a "show-flow." This is a minute-by-

